

Message Text

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SUBJECT: W/W: ARREST: INITIAL CONSULAR VISIT TO RECLUSORIO NORTE

1. ON AUGUST 19 CONOFF VISITED NEWLY-OPENED RECLUSORIO PREVENTIVO NORTE, DISCUSSED CONDITIONS WITH THE TWELVE AMERICAN INCARCERATED THERE AS OF THAT DATE, AND HELD FAIRLY LENGTHLY DISCUSSION WITH THE DIRECTOR, ANTONIO SANCHEZ GALINDO AND THE SUBDIRECTOR, RAFAEL VAZQUEZ. SANCHEZ GALINDO HAS SCHEDULED AN OFFICIAL MEETING WITH EMBCONOFFS FOR SEPTEMBER 7 TO BE FOLLOWED BY A COMPLETE TOUR OF THE FACILITIES. SINCE A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF WORK REMAINS BEFORE ALL PLANNED SERVICES FUNCTION SMOOTHLY, ON INITIAL VISIT CONOFF ASKED THAT HE BE TAKEN DIRECTLY TO SEE BAUJ PRISONERS. THE FOLLOWING DESCRIPTION IS, THEREFORE, OF NECESSITY SOMEWHAT IMPRESSIONISTIC.

2. RECLUSORIO PREVENTIVO NORTE IS A SPRAWLING COMPLEX ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE VILLAGE OF CUAUHEMEC IN THE EXTREME NORTHERN PART OF THE FEDERAL DISTRICT. THE APPROACH, ROADS AND NEIGHBORHOODSTREETS ARE EITHER UNFINISHED OR IN ABOMINABLE CONDITION. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE SHRUBS AND GRASS ALREADY APPEAR GENERALLY

WELL CARED FOR. AT THE ENTRANCE BUILDING VISITORS PASS THROUGH AN ELABORATE CHECK SYSTEM, THEN THROUGH A TUNNEL BEFORE REACHING THE PRISON'S INTERIOR,
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INCLUDING THE ADMINISTRATION BUILDING. THERE ARE

EIGHT DORMITORIES, EACH WITH ITS OWN RECREATIONAL AREAS AND CELLS DESIGNED FOR THREE INMATES EACH. FAMILY AND CONSULAR VISITS WILL BE IN SEPARATE BUILDINGS. THE ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER HAS AN AREA FOR FORMAL INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS THROUGH GLASS PARTITIONS. THE PRISON'S SUBDIRECTOR, LIC. RAFAEL VAZQUEZ, WHO ACCOMPANIED CONOFF TO THE DORMITORY WHERE MOST OF THE AMERICAN PRISONERS WERE HOUSED, EXPLAINED EN ROUTE THAT HE AND SEVERAL OTHER STAFF MEMBERS WERE WORKING FIFTEEN-HOUR DAYS AND LIVING AT THE PRISON UNTIL ALL IS COMPLETED. HE SAID THAT THE MAJOR PROBLEM WAS THE FAILURE OF MATERIALS TO ARRIVE ON SCHEDULE AND THAT PRIORITY IS GIVEN WHERE POSSIBLE TO COMPLETING THE WORK ON THE PRISONER'S DORMITORIES RATHER THAN ON THE AMENITIES IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE AREA.

4. THE TWELVE PRISONERS DESCRIBED PROBLEMS WHICH SEEM, IN THE MAIN, CAPABLE OF RESOLUTION, ALTHOUGH NOT NECESSARILY AS RAPIDLY AS THE PRISONERS WOULD LIKE. MOST COMPLAINED OF THE PROBLEM OF BRINGING IN PERSONAL ARTICLES OF CLOTHING. INMATE UNIFORMS AT THE NEW PRISONS ARE KHAKI RATHER THAN BLUE, AND ALL KHAKIS BROUGHT IN MUST BE OF THE SAME (RELATIVELY POOR) QUALITY. OTHER COMPLAINTS ALSO REVOLVED AROUND THE MORE REGIMENTED PRISON LIFESTYLE. ONE INMATE REMARKED, "FOR THE FIRST TIME, I FEEL AS THOUGH I WERE IN AN AMERICAN PENITENTIARY." ANOTHER SAID THAT IN LECUMBERRI HE HAD OFTEN HAD THE FEELING THAT HE WAS LIVING IN THE STREET. MANY COMPLAINTS WERE OF "NOTHING TO DO" AND THE GENERAL QUALITY OF PRISON FOOD (BEANS, CHEESE, AND SMALL AMOUNT OF MEAT) NOW THAT PRISONERS ARE NO LONGER ABLE TO BUY MEALS AT INDEPENDENTLY-RUN RESTAURANTE ON THE PREMISES.

5. AFTER TALKING WITH THE PRISONERS, CONOFF MET WITH THE PRISON DIRECTOR, A SOFT-SPOKEN MAN IN HIS EARLY FORTIES WHO SPICES HIS CONVERSATION WITH LITERARY ALLUSIONS AND IS OBVIOUSLY PROUD OF HIS KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH. SANCHEZ GALINDO'S PRINCIPAL POINTS ARE AS FOLLOWS:
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A. THE PRISONERS WILL EACH RECEIVE TWO NEW KHAKI UNIFORMS AS SOON AS THEY ARE DELIVERED TO THE PRISON. IN THE MEANTIME, ANY KHAKIS BROUGHT IN MUST BE OF PRISON QUALITY SO THAT THE MEXICAN PRISONERS WILL NOT ACCUSE HIM OF DISCRIMINATION. THERE IS NO PROBLEM IN BRINGING IN SWEATERS SINCE THE BUILDINGS HAVE NO HEAT. (HE ALSO MADE A SPECIAL DISPENSATION FOR

ONE PRISONER TO WEAR SWEATPANTS WHEN EXERCISING.)

B. HE SAID HE RECOGNIZED THE INADEQUACIES OF THE NORMAL MEXICAN PRISON DIET AND HE INDICATED THAT TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE, HE WOULD TRY TO SEE THAT AMERICAN CITIZENS HAD FOOD PREPARED MORE TO THEIR TASTES.

C. VISIT BY MEDICAL SPECIALISTS, E.G. DENTISTS AND OCULISTS, WOULD BEGIN IN APPROXIMATELY A WEEK. THOSE PRISONERS IN NEED OF HOSPITALIZATION WOULD BE SENT TO THE HOSPITAL AT TEPEPAN.

D. ALL AMERICANS (AND CANADIANS) ARE TO BE KEPT IN ONE DORMITORY UNLESS THEY REPRESENT A THREAT TO OTHER INMATES. (THE PRISON SOCIAL WORKER LATER TOLD CONOFF THEY EXPECTED TO HAVE ALL AMERICANS MOVED INTO ONE DORMITORY AS EARLY AS THAT NIGHT.)

E. WOMEN PRISONERS FROM LOS REYES COULD BEGIN VISITS AUGUST 20.

F. AMERICAN PRISONERS WOULD BE ALLOWED TO USE THE AUDITORIUM ONE DAY PER WEEK FOR THEATER WORK. HE URGED THAT CONOFFS BRING OUT BOOKS TO ESTABLISH LIBRARY IN ENGLISH AS SOON AS POSSIBLE--PREFERABLY "STEINBECK, FAULKNER, HEMINGWAY, DOS PASSOS" RATHER THAN CHEAP FICTION. (PORNOGRAPHY AND "REVOLUTIONARY" WORKS ARE STRICTLY FORBIDDEN)

G. HE STRESSED THAT SINCE ALL BASIC PRISONER NEEDS ARE TO BE MET BY THE INSTITUTION, NO INMATE SHOULD NEED MORE THAN TWENTY-FIVE OR THIRTY DOLLARS PER WEEK. ANY EXCESS SHOULD BE KEPT IN ADMINISTRATIVE ACCOUNTS

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IN ORDER TO PREVENT THE CORRUPTION FOR WHICH LECUMBERRI IS INFAMOUS.

6. COMMENT: IN TERMS OF THE APPARENT QUALITY OF THE ADMINISTRATION AND FACILITIES, "NORTE" WILL BE A VAST IMPROVEMENT OVER THE OLD BLACK PALACE OF LECUMBERRI. THE EMBASSY HOPES WITH THE PRISON ADMINISTRATION THAT SUCH EFFORTS AS RATIONING THE INMATES' SPENDING MONEY AND ROTATING THE GUARDS WILL HELP KEEP CORRUPTION OUT. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN HOW THE AMERICAN PRISONERS WILL REACT TO THE REGIMENTED LIFE OF A "REAL" PRISON AFTER THE DISORGANIZATION AND CORRUPTION OF LECUMBERRI WHERE, IF ONE HAD THE MONEY TO PAY, THERE WAS RELATIVE INTERNAL FREEDOM AND EVEN A CERTAIN DEGREE OF DECAYED LUXURY.

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